

CHAPTER 2

Welcoming Newcomers to a Safe, Inclusive, and Thriving School Environment

Some newcomer students and their families may be proficient in English and may already have experience with school structures similar to U.S. public schools, while others may need language accommodations and orientation to the processes, procedures, and family engagement opportunities in U.S. schools.

Some families may have left their homeland to escape violence, war, natural disasters, or other traumatic events. In addition, newcomer families are navigating employment, housing, and the other demands of establishing a new life in a new land.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, newcomer students and their families bring numerous strengths, including a global perspective, prior knowledge, and skills. Newcomers possess rich cultural backgrounds and may speak two or more languages. It is important to note that each newcomer's experience is unique, and assumptions about their experiences and/or backgrounds should be avoided. Schools should recognize and build on the strengths of newcomer students and their families; doing so can enhance the entire school community.

Establishing district or school policies and practices that are asset-based and offer a warm and affirming welcome to newcomer students and their families has long-term benefits for the students, their families, and the school community. When newcomer families feel welcomed, they are more apt to engage with their children's schools and teachers. Greater family engagement and involvement lead to positive relationships between immigrant families and the school and, ultimately, to better student outcomes.

Understanding the Legal Rights of Newcomers and Their Families

School and district administrators must understand and provide for the legal rights of newcomers and their families. In addition, it is incumbent upon administrators to ensure newcomer families are informed about and comprehend their rights. Brief summaries of the most relevant court cases and laws follow.

In the United States, undocumented immigrant students have the right to a free public education at the elementary and secondary level. In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark decision in *Plyler v. Doe*.

After reading this chapter, readers should be able to

- Understand the laws and regulations schools need to follow to protect the rights of immigrant and refugee students and their families;
- Build a knowledge base of research-informed practices for creating safe, supportive, and welcoming schools for newcomers who are MLs;
- Become familiar with schools that have successfully implemented practices and processes for welcoming newcomer students and engaging their families;
- Understand the challenges faced by older newcomer students with interrupted formal education and learn strategies for addressing this population of students;
- Develop strategies for continuing newcomer learning and family engagement during interruptions to in-person schooling;
- Acquire professional development tools for increasing their staff's ability to effectively build upon the assets of newcomers and their families and meet their needs; and
- Continue learning about newcomers and their families through an annotated bibliography of resources.

The Court's decision struck down a Texas law allowing districts to deny enrollment to undocumented immigrant children and policies in two school districts charging such children tuition. The Court held that denying undocumented immigrant children access to free public education violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. For additional information about states' and school districts' obligation to provide all children with equal access to public education at the elementary and secondary level, please see the resources listed in the resource table on this page.

- In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court determined, in *Lau v. Nichols*, that in order for public schools to comply with their legal obligations under Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI)*, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance, they must take affirmative steps to ensure that students who are not proficient in English can participate meaningfully in their educational programs and services.¹ That same year, Congress enacted the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA)*, which confirmed that public schools must take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by their students in their instructional programs.²
- The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit issued a decision in *Castañeda v. Pickard* in 1981 that strengthened educational programs for MLs.³ It established a three-part test to evaluate a school district's program for ELs. Specifically, the test looks at whether the program is based on an educational theory recognized as sound by some experts or a legitimate experimental strategy; whether the program and practices are reasonably calculated for the effective implementation of the educational theory; and whether, after a legitimate trial period, the program succeeds in producing results indicating that students' language barriers are actually being overcome within a reasonable timeframe. These standards also are used by the Department to evaluate districts' and states' compliance with civil rights laws.



Check out these RESOURCES

Chapter 1 of the NCELA [English Learner Family Toolkit](#) summarizes the legal rights of MLs and their families. The toolkit is designed specifically for families and is available in several languages, as is the app.

The Department of Education and the Department of Justice also have many resources to ensure families understand their legal rights. These include:

Fact Sheet: [Confronting Discrimination Based on National Origin and Immigration Status](#) (2021)

Dear Colleague Letter: [English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents](#) (2015)

Fact Sheet: [Information for Limited English Proficient \(LEP\) Parents and Guardians and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them](#) (2015)

Fact Sheet: [Ensuring English Learner Students Can Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs](#) (2015)

Dear Colleague Letter: [School Enrollment Procedures](#) (2014)

Fact Sheet: [Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School](#) (2014)

Questions and Answers: [Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School: Questions and Answers for States, School Districts and Parents](#) (2014)

¹ *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974); 42 U.S.C. § 2000d to d-7 (prohibiting race, color, and national origin discrimination in any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance).

² Pub. L. No. 93-380, § 204(f), 88 Stat. 484, 515 (1974) (codified at 20 U.S.C. § 1703(f)). The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education and the Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) share authority for enforcing Title VI in the education context. DOJ is also responsible for enforcing the EEOA.

³ 648 F.2d 989 (5th Cir. 1981).

- *Title I* of *ESEA* states that schools must provide parent communications required for parents of MLs in a uniform and understandable format and, to the extent practicable, in a language that the parents understand.⁴ These rules ensure schools meaningfully communicate to all families about any program, service, or activity they offer for MLs under *Title I* and *Title III*, regardless of the family's native language or English proficiency.⁵ Additionally, *ESEA* encourages family engagement and recognizes that parental involvement requires regular, two-way, meaningful communication about an ML's academic learning and other school activities.
- *Title I* of *ESEA* permits state and local educational agencies to administer the required state academic content assessments in languages other than English to students who are MLs. However, native language assessments of reading or language arts are allowed for these students for only the first three years, with a possible additional two years if the local educational agency (LEA) determines it is appropriate.⁶ *ESEA* also permits schools to exempt recently arrived MLs who have been enrolled in school in the United States fewer than 12 months from one administration of the state-required reading or language arts assessment and includes options for excluding reading and math scores of these recently arrived MLs from school accountability calculations in certain circumstances.⁷
- The *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records.⁸ *FERPA* applies to all educational institutions (i.e., schools) and agencies (e.g., school districts) that receive funds under any program administered by the Department. *FERPA* gives parents of students who are under 18 years of age, including applicable newcomer parents, and students who are 18 years of age or older or in attendance at an institution of postsecondary education (referred to in *FERPA* as "eligible students"), including applicable newcomer students, certain rights with respect to their children's or their own education records.
- The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* requires that whenever consent is required (e.g., for initial evaluations and initial provision of special education and related services), school personnel must use the language normally used by an individual, or for a child, the language that the parents normally use and understand.⁹

School and district administrators need to be aware of and protect the rights of newcomer students and their families. Although it is crucial for schools to meet their legal obligations to newcomers, it is not sufficient for creating a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment.

Welcoming Newcomers and Their Families

Schools can welcome newcomer students and their families from their very first contact. There are several different approaches mentioned in the research literature on schoolwide strategies to welcome newcomers, but the common themes are establishing two-way communication, exchanging information, welcoming newcomers' cultures and languages, building relationships with newcomer families, breaking down barriers to newcomers' access, and establishing partnerships with community organizations. Each of these is discussed briefly in the following sections.

⁴ *ESEA*, 1112(e)(4).

⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, & U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf>

⁶ *ESEA*, 1111(b)(2)(B)(vii)(III) and (ix).

⁷ *ESEA*, 1111(b)(3)(A).

⁸ *FERPA*, 20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99.

⁹ *IDEA*, 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.9 and 300.29.

Establishing Two-Way Communication With Newcomer Families in Their Preferred Language

Communication between newcomer families and school personnel is a critical first step for establishing positive, trusting relationships that can lead to greater family engagement.¹⁰ School personnel should identify the family's preferred language as soon as possible so the school can develop a plan for communicating with them, both orally and in writing, in that language.¹¹



CAVEAT

Many newcomers speak an indigenous language that is not the official language of their country. Such families may not mention this language at intake, even though it is their preferred language. This hesitancy and reticence may be due to the discrimination—or worse—against their culture group and the use of their language, which reveal their identity and allegiance as indigenous, in their home country. They persist in this thinking even in the face of a welcoming school district because they have the misconception that their language is not welcome here—or even less, perhaps—than it was in their homeland. Indigenous groups have different backgrounds and needs that should be both celebrated and addressed at intake and subsequently.

There are a variety of ways schools can meet families' language needs. Some schools may already employ staff who know the language and culture of the newcomer family. If not, school administrators should cast a wider net and identify multilingual staff in the district who are fluent in the family's language and know their culture. Districts should establish a protocol for connecting staff and families with trained interpreters. Districts can tap into their multilingual community and local partner organizations to identify candidates for their interpreter certification programs.

If school administrators and staff do not speak the newcomer family's language, they can convey a welcoming and accepting disposition by learning how to pronounce the newcomer student's name correctly and by conveying a warm and welcoming demeanor and a welcoming school and classroom environment.



Check out this RESOURCE

From the Institute on Community Integration, [Working with Language Interpreters: Information for Principals](#). In this series, there are two companion briefs, one for teachers and another for families.

Exchanging Information

As stated earlier, the U.S. school system may be unfamiliar to newcomer families. The school system in their country of origin may have very different norms and expectations, so they need to learn about American schooling in general and get information about even very common practices (e.g., raising one's hand), as well as the specific policies and practices of the school. Similarly, schools need to get specific information about newcomer students and their families. Newcomers are not a monolith. Not only do newcomer families have different countries of origin and different languages and cultures, they also have different backgrounds and

¹⁰ National Charter School Resource Center. (2020, November 23). *Planning for family engagement in the charter school life cycle: A toolkit for school leaders*. Manhattan Strategy Group. <https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/sites/default/files/upload/toolkits/Family-Engagement-Toolkit.pdf>

¹¹ U.S. Department of Justice, & U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf>

experiences. In addition to screening for English proficiency as required by law, it is important for schools to gather information from newcomer families about the student's educational history—even if the student does not have an academic transcript—to determine the best placement and immediate instructional goals for the student to ensure they are on the path to graduation. School administrators can put structures in place to exchange information with newcomer families; these structures include an orientation and a registration process.

Orientation for Newcomers

Establishing an orientation for newcomer families to learn about school policies and processes is one strategy school administrators use to exchange information. An orientation can be delivered through an in-person meeting at the school, a home visit, or via welcoming video messages in the family's home language or in English accompanied by translated subtitles. A variety of topics can be covered during an orientation. These may include school policies (e.g., homework/grading, attendance, discipline), logistics (e.g., lunch options, transportation), and programs, such as school clubs, sports, gifted education, and special education.¹²



Check out this RESOURCE

To learn more about welcoming newcomer students and families and get some ideas for designing an orientation, see [Welcoming and Orienting Newcomer Students to U.S. Schools](#) on the Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services website.

To communicate from the beginning that the school and family should be partners in meeting newcomer students' needs, the orientation should also offer multiple opportunities for dialogue with newcomer families. For example, the facilitators of the orientation should be prepared to answer newcomer families' questions and to learn about their priorities in a language they understand.¹³ An orientation is an opportunity for newcomer families to view their role in relation to the school and vice versa. At the outset, this is intended to establish an ongoing two-way relationship that will be maintained throughout the student's education. With advances in

technology, several presentation platforms offer simultaneous translations using closed captions in a variety of languages. Bilingual family members or staff can also record versions in additional languages.



Check out these RESOURCES

Need more information on translating and validating transcripts? See pages 16-18 in the REL Northwest [toolkit](#).

Does a newcomer student lack birth records or provide a birth date that may be wrong? Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services developed a guide, [Refugee Children in Schools: A Toolkit for Teachers and School Personnel](#), for estimating children's ages.

Has a newcomer resided in a Health and Human Services shelter prior to enrollment? The U.S. Department of Education has published [two fact sheets](#) on educating and enrolling these students.

Creating parent handbooks is another way to share school information with newcomer families. A [toolkit](#) from the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest highlights several handbooks that use simple text and pictures to illustrate the information provided and increase readers' comprehension.

Registration Process for Newcomers

A registration process for newcomers is how the school gathers critically important information about the student's linguistic, academic, social, and emotional strengths and needs to inform placement and instruction and to identify appropriate

¹² National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, (n.d.). *English learner family toolkit*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. <https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/family-toolkit>

¹³ U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *Information for Limited English Proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf>

wraparound services and level-the-field supports. School and district administrators who establish a uniform registration process can help to ensure that complete data are collected for all newcomer students and that no inappropriate questions are asked.

Registration is a “complex process dictated by federal, state, and local laws and policies.”¹⁴ Figure 2.1 outlines the steps of a registration process that collects background information on the student (e.g., prior schooling), gathers new information on the student’s knowledge and skills, and uses all this information to determine the student’s placement, program, and services.

Collecting and analyzing student records and transcripts are the first step of the registration process in the registration flow chart. Understanding newcomer students’ prior schooling will inform placement decisions, build upon students’ experiences, and facilitate individualizing program planning and services.¹⁵ Translating and validating transcripts are part of the analysis of student records, as are determining transfer equivalencies and awarding credit for work newcomer students have already completed. Some schools and districts have the capacity to review transcripts, whereas others contract with organizations to analyze transcripts. The collection and analysis of students’ school records are important for all newcomer students, but they are especially crucial for students entering secondary schools, as students will be accruing credits toward high school graduation.¹⁶

In addition to collecting information on prior schooling, other forms of documentation (e.g., health records, vaccinations, copy of birth certificate) should also be collected. It is important to note that the absence of some of documentation, such as Social Security cards or birth certificates, cannot prevent LEAs from enrolling students in schools.¹⁷ In the case of unaccompanied children or refugees whose records are not available, the school can tap other sources of information, such as U.S. government agencies and refugee resettlement agencies, to gather this or comparable information.¹⁸

Step 2 of the registration flow chart is “Screen and assess students to accurately identify services and needs and to meet federal requirements.” Whereas step 1 is collecting and analyzing existing information, such as a student’s prior schooling experiences, step 2 involves gathering new information from the student. Both phases of the registration process yield information to determine grade level, placement, services, and program development. It should be noted that much of the screening and assessments discussed



Check out this RESOURCE

The first chapter of the *English Learner Toolkit* is all about identifying MLs. It includes sample Home Language Surveys.

[Chapter 1 Tools and Resources for Identifying all English Learners.](#)

¹⁴ Greenberg Motamedi, J., Porter, L., Taylor, S., Leong, M., Martinez-Wenzl, M., & Serrano, D. (2021). *Welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomer students: A toolkit for educators of immigrant and refugee students in secondary schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021064.pdf

¹⁵ Martinez-Wenzl, M. (2018). *Finding the right starting point: Three steps for evaluating international transcripts* [Infographic]. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/infographics/pdf/REL_NW_Finding_the_Right_Starting_Point_Obtaining_Interpreting_and_Evaluating_International_Transcripts.pdf

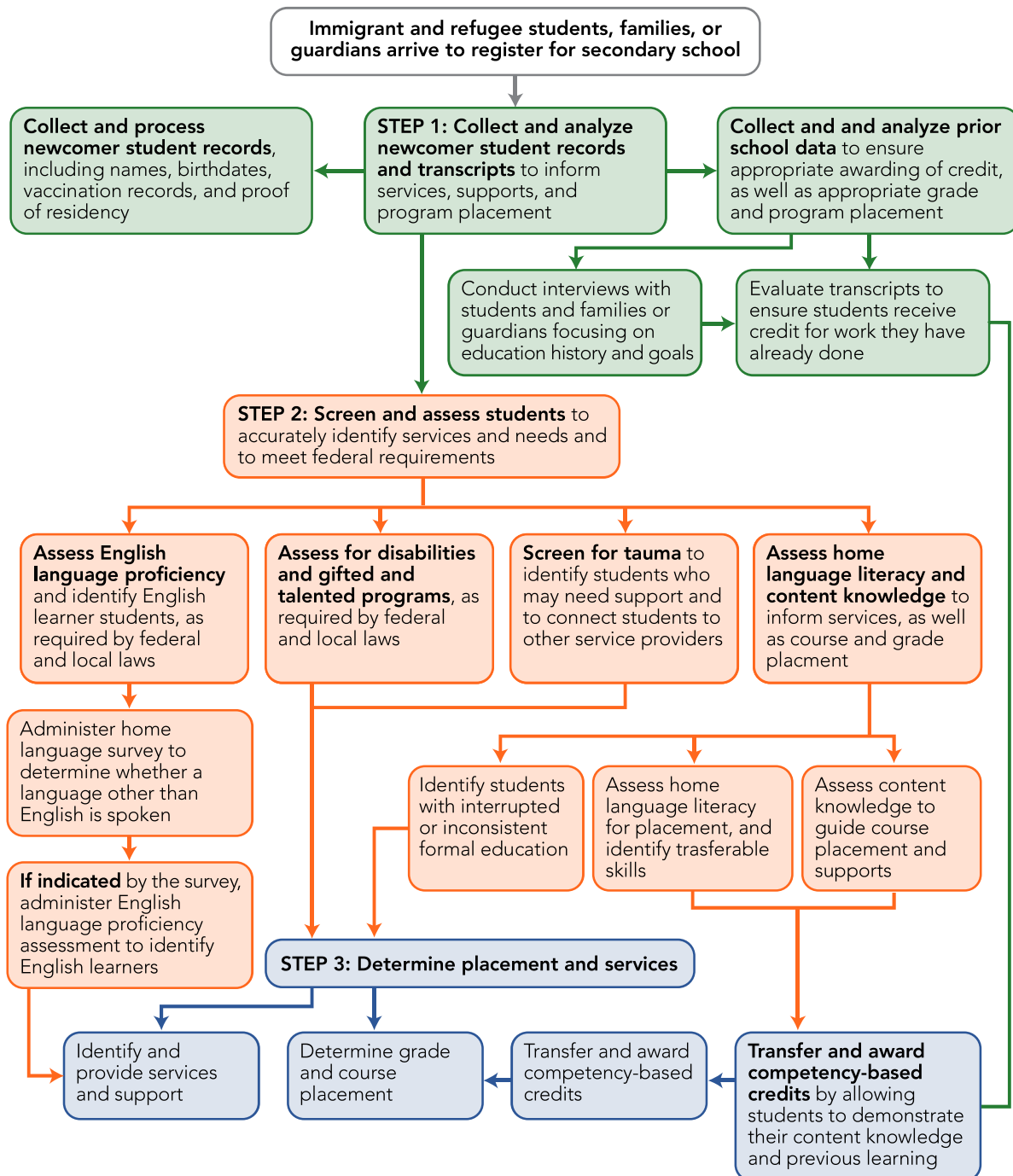
¹⁶ Greenberg Motamedi, J., Porter, L., Taylor, S., Leong, M., Martinez-Wenzl, M., & Serrano, D. (2021). *Welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomer students: A toolkit for educators of immigrant and refugee students in secondary schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021064.pdf

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Educational services for immigrant children and those recently arrived to the United States* [Fact sheet]. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/guid/unaccompanied-children.pdf>

¹⁸ Greenberg Motamedi, J., Porter, L., Taylor, S., Leong, M., Martinez-Wenzl, M., & Serrano, D. (2021). *Welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomer students: A toolkit for educators of immigrant and refugee students in secondary schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021064.pdf

below (special education, gifted and talented, and trauma screening) can and often do take place after the student is registered and settled in his or her new school rather than during the actual registration process. However, ESEA requires all students who may be MLs to be assessed for ML status within 30 days of enrollment (ESEA Section 3113[b][2]).

Figure 2.1. A Summary of the Registration Process for Newcomer Students



Note: Recreated for 508 compliance with permission from *Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools* (p. 14), by J. Greenberg Motamedi, L. Porter, S. Taylor, M. Leong, M. Martinez-Wenzl, and D. Serrano, 2021, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021064.pdf. Copyright 2021 by the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest (REL 2021-064).

As previously noted, *ESEA* Section 3113(b)(2) requires schools to assess students who may be MLs within 30 days of the student's enrollment. Initially, a home language survey is conducted to identify the language(s) spoken in the home. If the results indicate that a language other than English is how the family communicates, then the school assesses the student's English proficiency level. If the results of the English proficiency screener assessment determine that the student requires services from a language assistance program, then the school must offer English language services. School districts that use *Title I* or *Title III* funds to supplement language instruction educational programs (LIEPs) must inform the student's family of the results of the assessment and its recommendations within 30 days of the beginning of the school year or within two weeks of placement in an LIEP for students who enroll after the start of the school year) (*ESEA* Section 1112[e][3]). The notice must also provide families with information about families' options, including the right to opt out of language services. (*ESEA* Section 1112[e][3]).

The *IDEA* requires schools to identify and assess children who may have a disability and provide special education, if warranted. Schools must screen and assess newcomer MLs for disabilities and type(s) of disabilities (visit the [Office of Special Education Programs](#) for links to resources about identifying and assessing MLs). Evaluations may not be delayed because of a student's limited English language proficiency (ELP) or the student's participation in an LIEP. The *IDEA* recommends that a team of educators collaborate to assess MLs and develop the individualized education plan if the need for special education services is indicated.

In addition to screening for disabilities, schools may consider identifying students who may be gifted and talented. However, when LEAs lack culturally, developmentally, and linguistically appropriate assessments for MLs, it makes accurate determinations of gifted and talented newcomer students difficult. Some nonverbal assessment tools are available and when used in conjunction with other data may present a more complete estimate of the newcomers' knowledge and skills.¹⁹

During the screening and assessment processes, schools and districts should also want to look for potential trauma, as some newcomers have arrived from war-torn countries or refugee camps, or they may have escaped violent gangs. These traumatic events, including the migration to the school district, may cause newcomer students to suffer from anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and/or depression. In addition, leaving one's country, friends and family, and way of life to move to a new, unfamiliar country with a different language and norms is stressful for newcomer students and their families. Given the diversity of newcomers in U.S. schools, finding a linguistically and culturally appropriate screening tool for trauma may be difficult. It is recommended that schools partner with local mental health organizations to help determine if a newcomer student is suffering from trauma and, if so, to work with the mental health organization to provide the student and family with additional supports.²⁰



CAVEAT

The over- or underrepresentation of MLs in special education and/or gifted and talented programs is noted in the literature and becomes an issue for districts that fail to assess MLs accurately. Disproportionality in such programs is a sign that the problem may be present in a given school or school district.

¹⁹ Greenberg Motamedi, J., Porter, L., Taylor, S., Leong, M., Martinez-Wenzl, M., & Serrano, D. (2021). *Welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomer students: A toolkit for educators of immigrant and refugee students in secondary schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021064.pdf

²⁰ A deeper discussion of how schools can support newcomer MLs impacted by trauma is presented in Chapter 3 of this toolkit, "Supporting Newcomers' Social and Emotional Needs."

The last item in step 2 is conducting content and literacy assessments in the newcomer student's home language, when possible. Gathering information on a newcomer's content knowledge in areas such as mathematics and science through assessments in the student's home languages will enable more accurate placement decisions. Depending on the graduation requirements of the state educational agency (SEA), the achievement of newcomers in secondary schools on these assessments can lead to students receiving competency-based credits. It also may eliminate the need for newcomers to take courses to cover content they have already mastered.²¹



Check out this RESOURCE

Access the [Registering and Enrolling Refugee and Immigrant Students in Secondary Schools](#) webinar from the Office of English Language Acquisition for a discussion of best practices and resources for facilitating refugee and immigrant students' transition into U.S. schools.

The final and culminating step in the registration flow chart is using the information from the two previous steps to determine the newcomer's grade level, placement, programs, courses (if applicable), and support services. For secondary education students, this step may also include an individualized plan for high school graduation, postsecondary education, or for a career. This is not to imply that screenings and assessments are all accomplished during registration; gathering information and determining programming and services are ongoing processes.

Ideas in ACTION

When a student enrolls at **Manhattan Bridges High School**, counselors and teachers collaborate to develop an educational program designed specifically for that student, based on her educational history and test scores. Because many students are newcomers who bring transcripts from foreign schools with them, the guidance counselors work to validate the coursework from their home countries to determine newcomer progress toward graduation.

Learn more about these programs by visiting the school's website at <https://sites.google.com/manhattanbridgeshs.org/mbhs/home?pli=1>

Welcoming Newcomers, Their Cultures, and Languages

The school environment impacts a student's sense of belonging and overall mental health and well-being, and this is especially true for newcomers.

There are numerous strategies school leaders can use to make newcomer families feel valued and respected.²² The following are some suggested practices districts and schools might consider:

- Establish a "welcome center" that brings together school administrators, teachers, family liaisons, counselors, and an interpreter to meet with newcomer families individually when they first enter the school district.

²¹ Greenberg Motamedi, J., Porter, L., Taylor, S., Leong, M., Martinez-Wenzl, M., & Serrano, D. (2021). *Welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomer students: A toolkit for educators of immigrant and refugee students in secondary schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021064.pdf

²² Greenberg Motamedi, J., Porter, L., Taylor, S., Leong, M., Martinez-Wenzl, M., & Serrano, D. (2021). *Welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomer students: A toolkit for educators of immigrant and refugee students in secondary schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021064.pdf

- Identify mentors among the newcomer's peers to provide support and orientation during routine school activities such as lunch, class transitions, fire drills, and dismissal.
- Identify students, staff, or community members who speak the student's native language. They can be a resource for the student and the school, as needed.
- Offer home visits to families.
- Learn to correctly pronounce the names of newcomer students and strive to learn a few words or phrases of their languages. Encourage staff members to do likewise.
- Identify students, staff, or community members who speak the student's native language that could assist the front office staff when greeting students and families, as needed.
- Discuss with families the value of strong home language skills and the benefits of maintaining their languages at home and, if applicable, at school.
- Provide opportunities for the school community to learn about immigrant experiences through literature (such as the activity described below) or personal narratives. The objectives are for other students to empathize with newcomers and develop a more global perspective.
- Hire bilingual staff and recruit bilingual volunteers who speak the newcomers' language whenever possible.
- Provide training to all staff on why maintaining newcomer students' home languages is important and how to support students' bilingual development.
- Offer staff guidance on how to respond to parents' questions and comments.
- Investigate the possibility of offering a two-way dual language program to develop bilingual and biliterate students, both newcomers and English-dominant speakers.

Ideas in ACTION

Newcomers High School in Long Island City specializes in teaching recent immigrants. It launched the collaborative Building Bridges project with St. Luke's, a private middle school in Manhattan, to establish a conversation about diversity and combating bias. MLs at the high school exchange letters with their St. Luke's "buddies" and meet with them several times a year. The St. Luke's buddies help the students edit their personal immigration stories and then, in turn, develop research papers on immigration based on interviews with their newcomer buddies. Several newcomer students also created video diaries so that they could share their personal stories with more people.

Learn more about this project by visiting the school's website at https://30q555.echalsites.com/in_the_news

The physical environment can be a tool for welcoming newcomers and showing appreciation for their languages and cultures. Educators might consider the following:

- Hanging the flags of newcomers' home countries
- Posting signs that say "welcome" in the home languages of the schools' newcomers
- Purchasing books in newcomers' home languages for the library and classrooms
- Displaying newcomers' artwork and photos from their countries in hallways and classrooms
- Creating a Family Center in the school with comfortable seating where families, including newcomer families, can meet informally. Include books in newcomers' languages that can be loaned to families.



Ideas in ACTION

School staff at **Marble Hill School for International Studies** have sometimes faced difficulties reaching out to immigrant parents with little formal education or English proficiency; they have addressed this issue by hiring translators, creating a welcoming environment, and providing support for all families. For example, they have staff that speak Spanish, Bengali, Urdu, and several African languages. Staff also employ the New York City Department of Education's phone translation services for lesson commonly spoken African languages.

Learn more about this school by visiting the school's website at <https://www.marblehillsschool.org/>



Check out these RESOURCES

Understanding and Addressing Newcomers' Needs and Experiences, Fostering Empathy, and Promoting a Global Perspective

The resources below may provide ideas on how to help newcomers feel more comfortable in the classroom. They can also help educators gain new perspectives and receive useful guidance on supporting the needs of newcomer students and their families. Below are several resources that may be helpful for educators serving newcomer students.

1. A video from the Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific on the benefits of translanguaging. [*Multilingualism and Translanguaging in the Classroom.*](#)
2. An infographic from the Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific on the importance of incorporating student and family voice in education with the goal of creating culturally responsive classrooms. [*Including Voice in Education: Addressing Equity Through Student and Family Voice in Classroom Learning.*](#)
3. A video from the Regional Educational Laboratories West, Northwest, and Northeast and Islands on how families can utilize caregiver and family activity sheets and how teachers can incorporate this resource into their classrooms. [*Connecting Classroom Instruction to Learning at Home: Applying Academic Vocabulary to Multiple Contexts.*](#)

Partnering With Community Organizations

Schools might not have the resources and expertise needed to provide wraparound services for newcomer families. To support schools, there may be community organizations that have the expertise, resources, and mission to address the diverse needs of newcomer families. Through partnerships with various community organizations, schools can support newcomer families more comprehensively.

There is a range of community organizations schools may partner with, such as arts or cultural organizations, mental health centers, religious organizations, refugee resettlement agencies, and postsecondary education institutions (e.g., community colleges, career and technical programs, universities). Many school-community partnerships center around health, mental health, and social services (e.g., housing assistance, food banks, job centers). When choosing which organizations to partner with, schools should consider the needs of the newcomer families, as well as the availability, mission, ability, and interest of the organizations.

There are several steps schools and community organizations can take to ensure their partnerships run smoothly and effectively. It is recommended that partnerships are formalized and that jointly agreed-upon

expectations are put in writing. A schedule of regular meetings of staff from the school and the community organization should be established. In addition, any disclosure of personally identifiable information from student education records by the school to the community organization must comply with applicable privacy laws. In the case of FERPA, for instance, unless an exception to FERPA's general written consent requirement applies, a school's disclosure of personally identifiable information from a student's education records to a community organization is not permitted without the prior written consent of the parent or eligible student. Exceptions to FERPA's general written consent requirement can be found in 34 CFR § 99.31 and 20 U.S.C. §§ 1232g(b)(1)-(3), (b)(5), (b)(6), (h), (i), and (j). In certain circumstances, the disclosure of personally identifiable information from student education records by a school to a community organization may also require the school and community organization to enter into a written agreement.²³



In the 2019–2020 school year, **Manhattan Bridges High School**, boasted a 4-year graduation rate (90 percent) that exceeded city (77 percent) and borough (78 percent) percentages. The school achieved such success by building intentional partnerships with key community organizations:

- **Cornell University Hydroponics Program and Internship:** pays student interns to do hydroponics research with a university professor after school
- **College Now at the City University of New York:** grants students access to courses, including “College 101,” psychology, and criminal justice courses, earning college credits for participants
- **St. Joseph’s College New York and Fordham University:** provide students with summer programs on SAT preparation
- **Options Center at Goddard Riverside Community Center:** provides students additional one-on-one college counseling
- **iMentor:** matches students in 9th, 10th, and 11th grades to professional mentors from across New York City; mentors meet with their mentees during monthly events and provide another layer of support to help students focus on their college and career goals.

Learn more about this school by visiting the school's website at <https://sites.google.com/manhattanbridgeshs.org/mbhs/home?pli=1>

Creating Safe and Supportive Schools for Newcomer Students and Their Families

Schools have a responsibility to provide not only a welcoming environment for newcomer students and their families, but also to ensure the school environment is safe, inclusive, and supportive.²⁴

School administrators can work to ensure that newcomers feel and are safe in school. Policies should be reviewed to ensure that the policy has clear language



Check out this
RESOURCE

This [video](#) from the U.S. Department of Education outlines schools' obligations to address the harassment of protected students.

²³ For more information on the sharing of personally identifiable information from student education records under FERPA with community-based organizations, please see the Department's guidance entitled, “The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Guidance on Sharing Information with Community-Based Organizations,” available at studentprivacy.ed.gov/Community_Based_Organizations.

²⁴ National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. (n.d.). *English learner family toolkit*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. <https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/family-toolkit>

protecting newcomers from bullying. Schools should provide anti-bullying professional learning to ensure that teachers and staff know how to recognize and intervene when bullying occurs.²⁵ In addition, the anti-bullying policy then needs to be communicated to students and consistently enforced. The same is true for establishing an anti-bias policy that addresses racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural bias. School administrators can provide educators and other school staff with tools and strategies to implement an anti-bias approach to learning.

Schools that have a positive school climate are safer and more welcoming places for all students, including newcomers and their families. According to the Safe and Supportive Schools Model (see Figure 2.2) developed by a national panel of researchers and other experts, there are three key elements of a positive school climate:

1. **Engagement:** Strong relationships between students, teachers, families, and schools, and strong connections between schools and the broader community
2. **Safety:** Schools and school-related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying, harassment, and controlled-substance use
3. **Environment:** Appropriate facilities, well-managed classrooms, available school-based health supports, and a clear, fair disciplinary policy



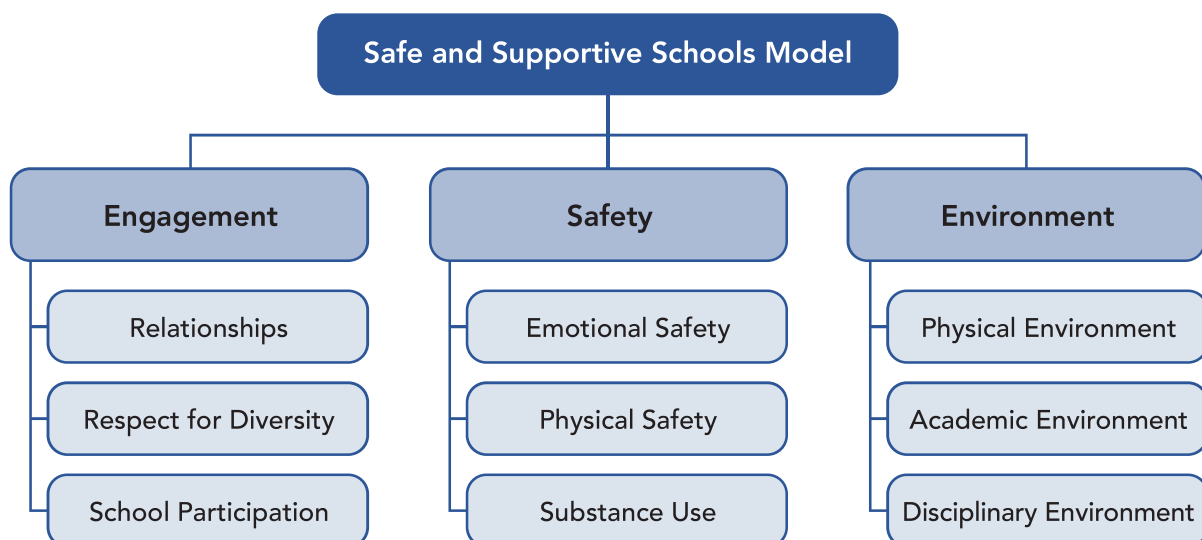
Check out this RESOURCE

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) has developed the high-quality, adaptable [ED School Climate Survey](#) (EDSCLS) and associated web-based platform. Version 4.5 was released on April 28, 2021. The EDSCLS can be downloaded and administered free of charge.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the overlap among these three elements. It is critical that all three elements are aligned in policy and practice.

School administrators can gather data on their school climate to see which of the key elements may need strengthening. There are several school climate assessments available. Once data have been collected and analyzed, administrators may then consult resources, such as the [School Climate Improvement Resource Package](#), before launching efforts to improve their school climate.

Figure 2.2. Safe and Supportive Schools Model



Note: From *Safe Supportive Learning*, by the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, (n.d.), (<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/>). Copyright 2021 by American Institutes for Research. Recreated for 508 compliance with permission.

²⁵ The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments has several training modules on this topic: <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/safety/bullyingcyberbullying>

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY

Purpose

This activity is designed to help educators evaluate the school or district's learning environment for newcomers and begin to see their role in creating a safe and supportive learning environment for newcomers at both the school- and class-level. This activity can lead to a rich discussion on how the school or district can begin to address areas of the learning environment that can be enhanced to better meet the needs of newcomers. The activity could also serve as a formative assessment to gauge how much educators at the school/district already know about safe and supportive learning and determine future instruction they might need.

*Four Corners:
Providing a Safe
and Supportive
Learning
Environment²⁶*

Materials

- Four, large sticky notes
- Set of colored markers

Time Required for Activity

- 1 hour

Preparation for Facilitator

1. Read Chapter 2 of the toolkit and summarize key info from the chapter that will be relevant to present to your participants.
2. Post a large sticky note near each corner of the room.
3. Label the sticky notes accordingly:
 - #1 What does a safe and supportive school look like for our newcomers?
 - #2 What is our school already doing to cultivate a safe and supportive environment?
 - #3 What more could our school do to create a safe and supportive environment?
 - #4 What challenges might we face as we work to provide this environment, and what are some potential solutions?

Instructions for Facilitator

1. Review the content of the last professional learning session and open the floor to discussion of additional ideas and/or questions that arose from that session.
2. Present summarized information from Chapter 2, if relevant/appropriate.
3. Put participants into four groups and have each group go to the poster that corresponds to the number of their group (i.e., 1-4).
4. Provide each group with a different colored marker and ask them to record ideas to address the question on their poster. Tell the participants you will give them two minutes and when you call time, they must rotate to the next poster.

²⁶ Learn more about this activity at <https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/week-2-collaboration-and-movement-using-four-corners>

5. Once two minutes have elapsed, ask the participants to rotate clockwise as a group to the next poster. Instruct participants to read the question and the ideas posed by the previous group. Then tell them to add their ideas to the poster. If participants agree with the ideas recorded by the group(s) who have already viewed this poster, encourage them to note this with a star or some other icon. Once time is up, ask the participants to rotate again.
6. Repeat the process until each group has visited all four posters.
7. Lead the participants in a discussion of the ideas presented on the posters. Note where the school is successful and where the school can grow to better meet the needs of newcomers.
8. Begin to plan the next steps to begin addressing the growth areas. Consider forming working groups of educators/school staff to research and develop a plan for addressing the areas of the school environment/instruction that can be enhanced for newcomers.

Virtual Learning Modifications

Participants meet on a virtual platform, and the facilitator uses breakout rooms to simulate the four corners. The facilitator can drop into each breakout room a link to a Google Doc with slides with each of the four corner prompts. Participants in each breakout room will discuss each slide for a pre-determined number of minutes and then rotate to the next slide. At the end of the activity, the facilitator can use a shared whiteboard to guide and collect information from the debrief.

Professional Learning Resources

The National Research and Development Center to Improve Education for Secondary English Learners created a series of modules for developing educator expertise to work with adolescent English learners. These modules were developed through consultations with leading linguists and educators from around the world. These resources can be used with pre-service and in-service educators as professional development activities. Each module contains the following:

- An introduction
- A series of activities
- Links to related readings and videos
- Directions on how to lead teachers through the module activities

For more information and to access the modules, visit the website of the National Research and Development Center to Improve Education for Secondary English Learners at <https://www.elrdcenter.wested.org/resources-modules-overview>.

Resources

The resources below have been selected based on the following criteria:

- Resource produced by a federally funded study or center
- Resource produced by an open access and peer-reviewed journal
- Resource produced by a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization

Greenberg Motamedi, J., Porter, L., Taylor, S., Leong, M., Martinez-Wenzl, M., & Serrano, D. (2021). *Welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomer students: A toolkit for educators of immigrant and refugee students in secondary schools*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, Regional Education Laboratory Northwest. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021064.pdf

As the title suggests, this toolkit discusses the why and how of welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomers and their families. It provides specific information and resources for processes, such as transcript translation and awarding competency-based credit, as well as many other topics school administrators should consider.

Office of English Language Acquisition. (2017). English learner toolkit for state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) (2nd Rev. ed.). U.S. Department of Education. <https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/english-learner-toolkit>

The EL toolkit is designed for state, district, and school administrators and for teachers. It offers tools and resources to help them meet their legal obligations in providing support to ELs to learn English while meeting college- and career-readiness standards.

Stuart-Cassel, V., Terzian, M., & Bradshaw, C. (2013, May). *Social bullying: Correlates, consequences, and prevention*. American Institutes for Research, National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/1315%20NCSSLE%20Social%20Bullying%20d7_lvr_0.pdf

This brief focuses on social bullying, a form of emotionally aggressive bullying behavior. It includes discussion of how social bullying is defined, what distinguishes it from other types of aggression, how commonly it occurs in schools, and what factors contribute to social bullying involvement. The brief summarizes research findings concerning the impacts of social bullying on individual social development and adjustment and identifies implications for school learning environments. The last section describes school-based approaches for preventing and reducing social bullying.

The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education jointly issued the following resources to inform school leaders about their obligations when communicating with families of MLs (including those who are newcomers) and to support their practices:

Dear Colleague Letter: [*English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents*](#)

Fact Sheet: [*Information for Limited English Proficient \(LEP\) Parents and Guardians and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them*](#)

Fact Sheet: [*Ensuring English Learner Students Can Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs*](#)